ARCHITECTURAL HISTORICAL TOUR



VICTORIAN BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS

McLean County Arts Council

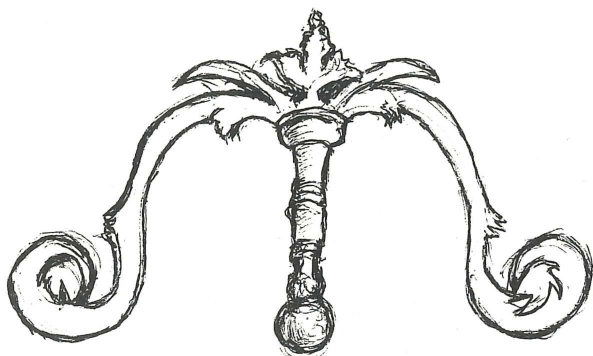
This walking tour is one of a series of tours of historic McLean County. This walk describes Bloomington as it is May 1, 1979. The tour was prepared under the auspices of the McLean County Arts Council and written by staff writer Deborah Corra in cooperation with Greg Koos of the McLean County Historical Society.

We wish to thank Wade Abels for his review and comment on the material in this tour.

[1] Numbers in brackets refer to the corresponding numbers on the map on the back cover.

Drawings by Suan Guess-Welcker.

Cover: detail of home at 409 E. Grove St.



Architectural-Historical Tour

Victorian Bloomington Homes In The Grove Street District

The tour begins at the corner of Grove and East Streets at the McBarnes Memorial Building[1] which was built with funds from Mr. and Mrs. John McBarnes and the McLean County Board of Supervisors in 1923 in an electic Neo-Classic style as a memorial to McLean County citizens who served in World War I. The stone carving is the work of Joseph Petarde, an Italian immigrant who is famous for his work in central Illinois. Of particular interest are the narrow corn leaf capitals, the thick columns showing an Egyptian influence, the stylized relief over the third floor and the decorative inset *fasces* on the third floor (a bundle of rods crossed by axe handles — the ancient symbol of the Roman state). This building houses the McLean County Historical Society Museum and other community agencies.

The Grove Street district was the original settlement of the wealthy in Bloomington and retains the greatest concentration of the finer Victorian era homes remaining in the city. Most of the houses are of historic importance in that they were built and occupied by the provincial aristocracy of the burgeoning industrial era in the second half of the 19th century.

Go east on Grove, Cross Albert

"The Oaks"[2] at 301 E. Grove (behind the newer apartments) was built in 1859 by Asahel Gridley, Bloomington's first millionaire. A fine view of this Italianate structure can be seen from just south of the corner of Albert and Grove. Notice the tile roof, the dormers with finials and the arched windows.

Continue south on Albert and turn east on Olive

Another view giving an indication of the scale of the building can be seen from the gateway on Olive Street. Gridley was responsible for bringing the railroad through Bloomington, made his fortune in real estate, was a lawyer by profession and rode the circuit where he became acquainted with Abraham Lincoln. Upon first seeing this elegant Victorian mansion in the Italianate style Lincoln is reported to have exclaimed, "Do you want everybody to hate you, Gridley?" This home stood on the northern edge of Blooming Grove and originally had beautiful porches looking out into trees and landscaping with iron rabbits, deer and a life-like Newfoundland dog. It is also said that peacocks were kept. Perhaps the Gridley's most interesting dinner guest was General Tom Thumb, P. T. Barnum's famous midget. At dinner his height was supplemented by a "Webster's Unabridged Dictionary."

A delightful martin house is sitting on a stone wall on the eastern boundary of the property. Miniature stones and shingles were used in a chalet-type style and it is still in quite good condition.



Turn north on Gridley

At the corner of Grove and Gridley Streets is Twin City Hydromatic[3], built in 1945 as an automobile show room. It is in the Art Moderne style; the most prominent features are the flat roof and rounded corners with curved glass which give a clean, streamlined effect.

Go east on Grove

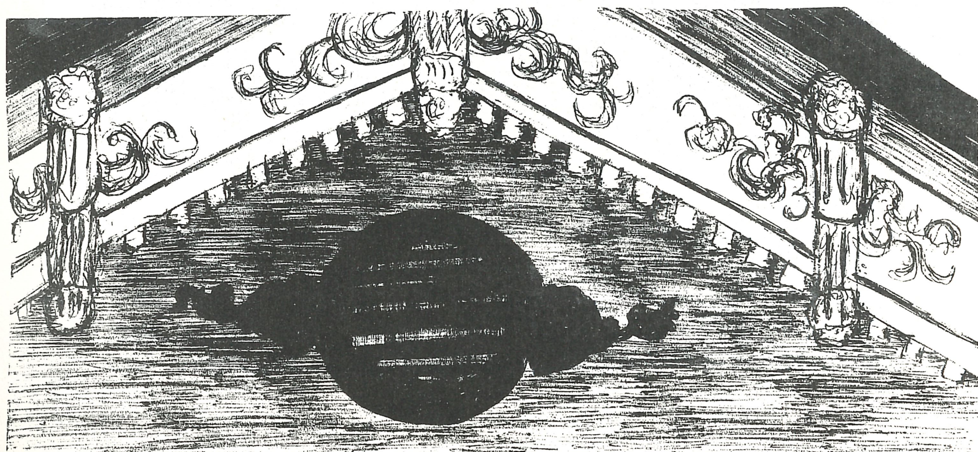
The home at 401 E. Grove[4] was built in the late 1850's and shows a combination of Greek Revival and Italianate features. The transom and sidelights around the door and the pediment (peaked) roof with exaggerated horizontal returns are from the Greek Revival influence whereas the heavy eave brackets, round attic window and bay window on the east side are Italianate. This house was probably moved to this location by Dr. D. O. Moore in 1874. Dr. Moore practiced medicine in Bloomington and once when asked about a non-paying patient, replied, "I got something worth more than money. I got appreciation."

Built 1874
W.P. June 17, 1879

Continue east

The Victorian house[5] at 405-407 E. Grove, the home of Lawrence Weldon, was designed to resemble an Italian villa. Its most prominent feature is the suggested tower, or *campanile*, on the west side dressed with heavy brackets and wide eaves. Note also the carved stone lintels over the windows and the fine decorative fretwork in the soffits under the overhangs. The front porches are later additions.

U.S. Grant stayed here after his trip around the world in the late 1870's. He was the guest of Lawrence Weldon, Judge of the Court of Claims, Washington, D.C.



Go east

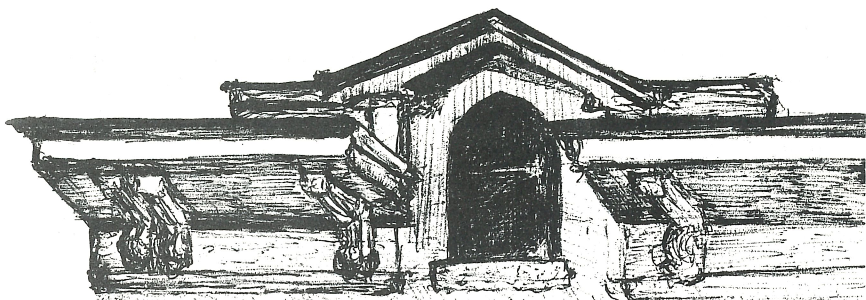
The house at 409 E. Grove[6] is the finest example of the Victorian period Queen Anne style in Bloomington. It was built by Edward Gridley in the 1880's. The Queen Anne style is noted for its eclecticism in the variety of forms, materials, influences and detail. This home was originally multi-colored, which would have highlighted the exuberance of design.

Huber Light bought the house in 1903 and his sister, the actress Margaret Illington (Maude Light), would often visit her family here. She later married Major Bowes, famous for his "Amateur Hour" radio show.



Proceed east

At 421 E. Grove[7] is a fine brick Victorian era home in the Italianate style with typical paired heavy roof brackets and arched windows. Under the paint is a rich red brick that was originally complemented by a red rose garden. It was built around 1872 for J. S. Roush, a wholesale grocer.

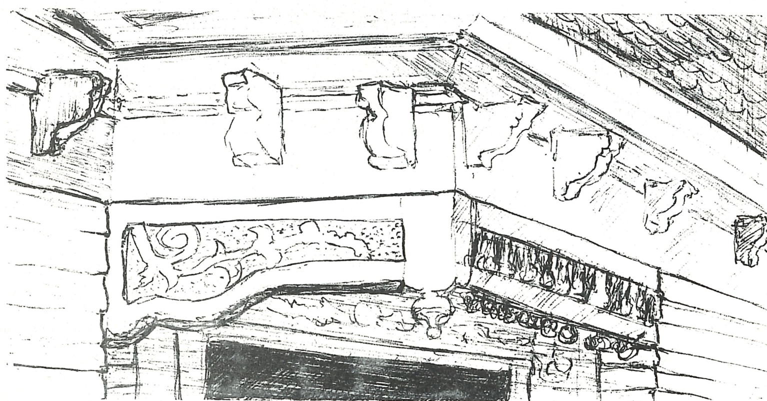


Cross McLean Street

On the southeast corner of McLean and Grove is one of the marble capitals from the 1868 Courthouse that burned in 1900.

Continue east

The home at 507 E. Grove[8], a much less ornate Queen Anne than at 409 E. Grove, is typical of the building stock which makes up much of Bloomington. It was built in the late 1880's for Charles E. Dalton, a stationer and news dealer. The design features were influenced by Charles Eastlake and were mass-produced and then assembled by the builder at the site. Paul Moratz, local architect and planing mill operator, referring to this type of house said, "These homes are inexpensive in construction and suit the majority of people who are desirous of making their home a convenient, artistic and desirable dwelling."

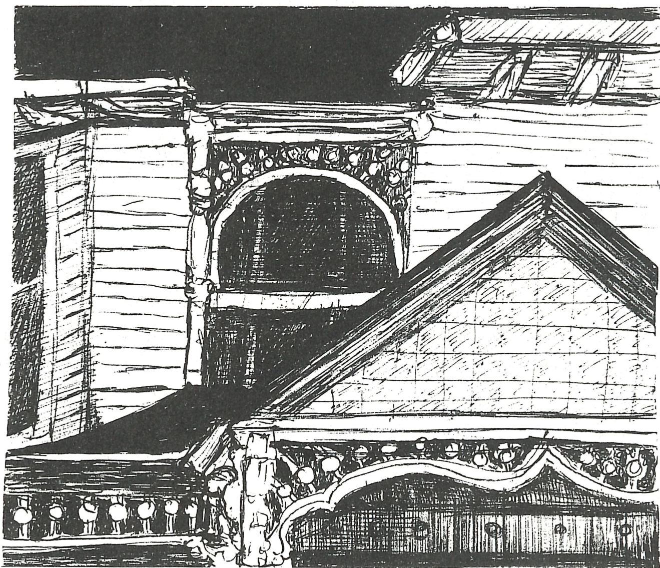


Cross the street to 510 E. Grove

This is the Ruben M. Benjamin House[9], built by John Routt in 1856. Mr. Routt, who later became governor of Colorado, was 19 years old at the time he constructed this house. The structure is framed in black walnut and is in a transitional style with Greek Revival and Italianate elements. The Greek Revival style predominates with the use of corner pilasters, tall windows and a pediment roof. The round attic window and the roof brackets are Italianate.

R. M. Benjamin had a brilliant law career which was highlighted by his participation in formulating the anti-monopolistic state regulatory sections of the Illinois Constitution of 1870. The famous Granger cases in which Benjamin defended the People versus the Railroads were a result of the new constitution and were taken as far as the U.S. Supreme Court where they became the first cases decided in favor of government control of corporations.

The Benjamin House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is currently being restored.

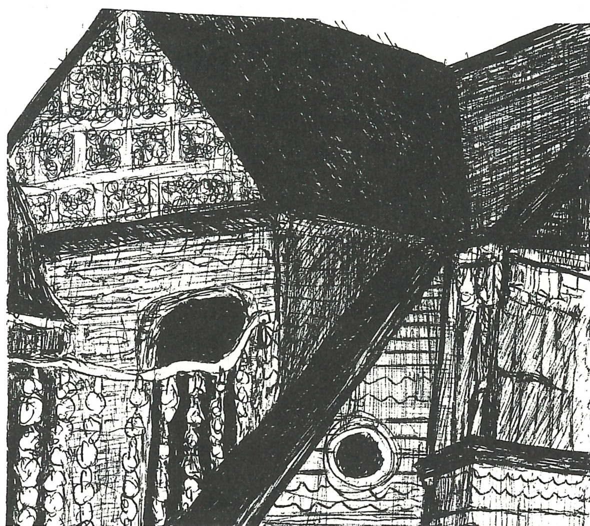


Proceed east

The house at 602 E. Grove[10] shows the influence of the California Mission style which was popular at the time of World War I. The simplicity of form is characteristic of the style. This home was once occupied by Albert Messing, an

Illinois Wesleyan University Professor and Rabbi of the Jewish congregation.

The Victorian house next door at 604 E. Grove[11] was built in the early 1890's for Lucius T. Wilcox, a drygoods merchant. It is an exceptional example of the Queen Anne style with the triple repetition of the gable roof line and delightful gingerbread woodwork; notice the typical variety of shingle styles. Originally this home would have been multi-colored. The fine oak doors and the leaded beveled glass over the front window give an added touch of elegance.



Walk east to Grove and Clayton

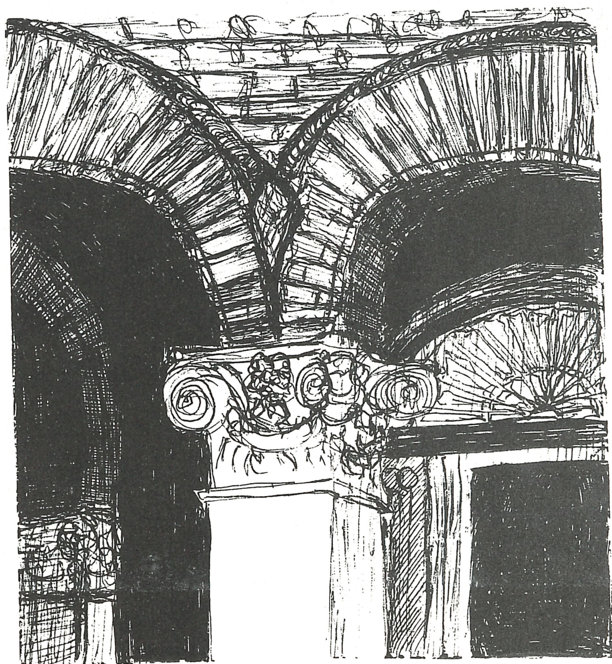
On the southeast corner of Clayton and Grove is another fine Victorian home[12] in the Queen Anne style which retains the multi-colored treatment. Notice the figurative shingles on the tower roof, the repetition of the tower shape in the front porch, the arched basement windows, the wall detailing on the upper floors, the use of stained glass in the attic windows and the finials on the roof. On the Grove Street side one can see carved limestone lintels over the windows and along Clayton Street there is fine figurative brickwork. This structure achieves tremendous height without calling attention to that fact.

This home was built for George Cox, Secretary-Treasurer and General Manager of the Hungarian Roller Mill Company which was a prominent westside landmark.

Proceed south on Clayton for two blocks

On the southeast corner of Clayton and Taylor stands the Vrooman-Scott Mansion[13], built for Matthew T. Scott in the late 1870's. It was originally in the Victorian Italianate style and was remodeled to its present form. The porches on the north and west were added retaining the heavy roof brackets and show Romanesque influence in the use of the heavy flat arches. Across the front of the house on the second floor is a ballroom with Tiffany stained glass windows. The spaciousness of the grounds lends dignity to the structure and one can picture what The Oaks once looked like as it had a similar setting.

Matthew T. Scott was a prominent landowner; his daughter, Julia Scott, continued to live in the house after her marriage to Carl Vrooman who was Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in the Wilson Administration and a world traveler. Mrs. Vrooman is still living here. It may be of interest to note that the plaque on a tree (no longer standing), known as the "Lincoln Oak," marking it as the site of various speeches given by Lincoln and Douglas, was put up in a Democrat's backyard in 1914 by Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Vrooman, staunch Wilson supporters, as a trick to steal Republican thunder during an election year.



Continue south on Clayton

At 502 S. Clayton is the Hamilton House[14] which does not have architectural significance but is of note because it belonged to John M. Hamilton from 1873 to 1888. John Hamilton was a successful lawyer and governor of Illinois for 18 months.



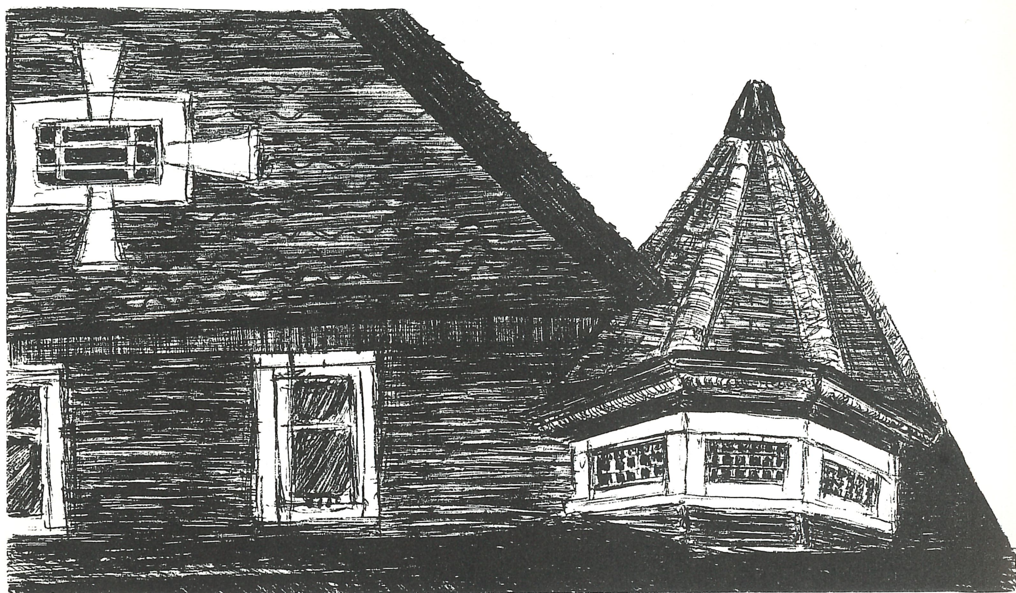
In 1876 at the age of 29 Hamilton was elected to the State Senate where he attracted attention for his youth, energy and total support of John A. Logan for the U.S. Senate. In 1879 he was elected president *pro tem* and the following year he won the nomination and was elected Lieutenant Governor. When Governor Shelby Cullom replaced David Davis in the U.S. Senate in 1883 John Hamilton became governor of Illinois. He was an unpopular governor because license fees of $500 a year were imposed on taverns, forcing many to close and he sent in the state militia to break strikes in Madison and St. Clair Counties. He tried to win the nomination for another term as governor but when he found he had no support he withdrew, outwardly gracious, in Oglesby's favor, but the Pantagraph reported that privately:

"Hamilton is said to be furious over the conduct of his appointees, who have been urging him to make a fight, and at

the same time are knifing Hamilton on the quiet. It is said that he will in a few days erect a guillotine and take unto himself a few official heads" (March 28, 1884, p. 1).

Hamilton did not return to Bloomington but settled into a profitable legal practice in Chicago. He was remembered locally as the "blond mistake."

The Hamilton House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Go north on Clayton

At 705 E. Olive[15] is a Queen Anne style home on a smaller scale than those on Grove Street. It includes the typical variety of shingle styles, a modest tower and a single stained glass window on the east side. This home was built in the early 1890's for Lee B. Ellis, owner of the original Ellis Restaurant which was in operation until the mid 1950's. The wall-sized bill of fare from the Ellis Restaurant can still be seen in the Federal Cafe.

Continue east on Olive

On the northeast corner of Olive and Clinton stands the Heafer House[16]. This is one of the few examples of the Gothic Revival style in Bloomington. Built of brick in the late 1860's, it features the main elements of that style: steeply

pitched roof, a variation of Gothic windows and wall dormers. Typical scroll-work along the roof edges has been removed.

Edgar Heafer, a tile and brick manufacturer and former mayor of Bloomington, lived here for many years. His company is responsible for the ponds at Lakeside Country Club and Holiday Park — the clay pits which supplied the raw material for the tiles and bricks.

Return to Clayton and walk north to Front

On the northeast corner of Clayton and Front is a Victorian home in the Shingle style[17], named for obvious reasons. It is a variation of the Queen Anne style and also shows a Gothic influence in its roof line. Single color treatment is typical of the Shingle style with variation achieved by the different shapes of the shingles. The rounded ones are known as feathered shingles. Note the leaded diamond-shaped glass in a window on the west side.

This house was built for Delmar Darrah in 1905. Mr. Darrah was a moving force behind the building of the Scottish Rite Temple and he wrote and produced the American Passion Play which has become an annual event at the Scottish Rite Temple since 1924 and draws a national audience.



Walk west to 605 E. Front

This structure[18], designed by George Miller, was built in 1896 for George Hanna, a successful stock-breeder. Its notable independence of design, clean lines and rugged stone work are unusual for that decorative era. Its style is a product of Miller's imagination and the basic line of the Swiss chalet.

Continue west to Evans and turn north to Washington

On the southwest corner of Washington and Evans is another capital salvaged from the 1868 Courthouse after it burned in 1900.

Go west on Washington

The Oscar Mandel House[19] at 507 E. Washington is another of Bloomington's fine Victorian homes in the Queen Anne style which was built in the early 1890's. It is Bloomington's best example of the typical use of a variety of colors and textures throughout the building. This house also shows the emerging interest in Romanesque features in the use of a rough stone porch, basement lintels and stone window sills on the first floor. Note the leaded art glass on the east side.

Mr. Mandel referred to himself professionally as a capitalist.



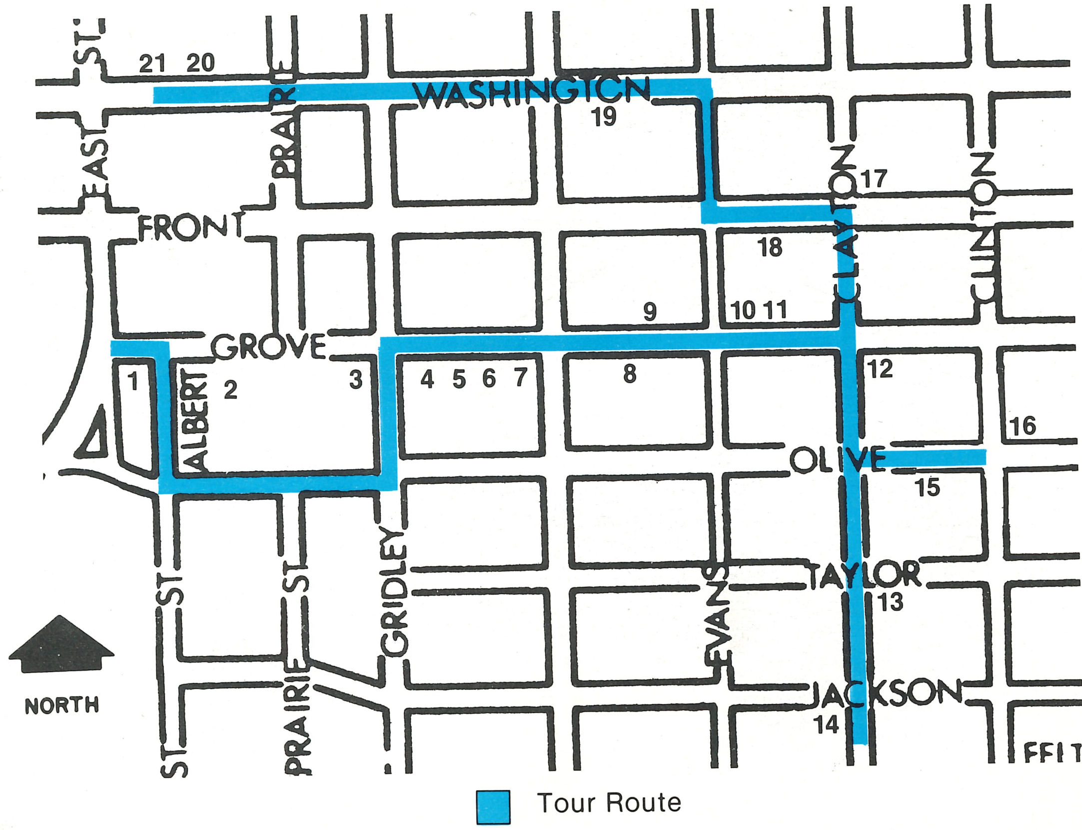
Continue west on Washington three blocks

The building at 210 E. Washington is in the Federal style[20]. It formerly housed the Bloomington Club and the second floor is now the McLean County Arts Center.

In the small park to the west of the building stands the Trotter Memorial Fountain[21], carved by Lorado Taft in 1911 to commemorate the Trotter Family. Georgiana Trotter

was an attorney and the first woman in the United States to be naturalized as a U.S. citizen. As a member of the School Board she felt she should be a citizen even though she could not vote. Taft commented on the sculpture that for him it was "a play spell in the midst of crowding duties, an affectionate message for little people to come . . . that little ones had played here long before we came."

Tour Route



WASHINGTCN
EAST ST
FRONT
PRAIRE
GROVE
ALBERT
ST
PRAIRIE ST
GRIDLEY
EVANS
CLAYTON
CLINTON
OLIVE
TAYLOR
JACKSON
NORTH
1
2
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4 5 6 7
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Tour Route